



**Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu  
City of New Orleans**

**2016 State of the City Address**

**The ReFresh Project  
Tuesday, June 21, 2016**

***\*Remarks as prepared for delivery\****  
**Embargoed until delivery**

**I have so much to say to you and so little time left to say it.**

**So much to do, yet so little time to get it all done: over six years in, a little less than two short years to go.**

**The state of our city is strong and it is getting stronger every day. Your city has become a shining example, to all of America, of what is possible.**

**Indeed, we are here today in the heart of our city, looking out over our rooftops.**

**Today it is a beautiful view, but it has not always been that way. Think about where we were eleven years ago... many of us were on rooftops for a very different reason.**

**We retreated to our rooftops to escape the flood. Being on the rooftop was about survival.**

**Today, we return to this rooftop not to run from danger, but to rejoice in what we see before us. And look with hope and optimism into the future.**

**From here, we can look out to see not only our cultural history/but also the 'new way' of doing business/on display.**



**We can see the new [Lafitte Greenway](#), which connects the bayou - where native traders first settled the land – all the way to [Congo Square](#) – a precious gathering place, and the cradle of jazz. A pathway through once**

segregated neighborhoods/now bringing people together, creating a ‘new way’ for the future.

We can see [Willie Mae’s Scotch House](#) and [Dooky Chase](#), where the mothers and fathers of the Civil Rights movement broke bread/and where we continue to break bread together to this very day.

We can see the newly-renovated historic [Carver Theater](#) and a new [Zulu](#) headquarters – cultural institutions tied to our past, yet leading us down the pathway to the future.

And then there is this building - [The ReFresh Project](#). It is one of those things that would have been ‘[pie in the sky](#)’ even a few years ago, let alone right after the storm, right here on Broad and Bienville.

Home to a [Whole Foods](#), a community wellness center, and terrific nonprofits like [Liberty’s Kitchen](#), which is saving lives every day.



From this great place, you can see the new [Phyllis Wheatley](#) and [Morris Jeff Schools](#) - two of more than 30 new world class 21<sup>st</sup> century schools that our children so desperately needed and they so rightly deserve.

Now, nearly every child attends a public charter school, and we’re improving faster than anywhere else in the United States.

Our graduation rate is up 25 points, drop-out rates are down, and our young African-American men are graduating at rates higher than both the state and national averages.

The pathway to the future goes through the school house door and our kids are storming through it. We are getting better and fast.

That is progress. And now we have to build on this progress.

Our schools are now coming back to local control. And in the fall election we have to elect an outstanding school board that will build on the strong foundation already in place, maintaining choice and autonomy, so our kids can have the future they deserve. We must never go back.



From this rooftop, you can also see the new [University Medical Center](#) and the soon to be complete [VA Hospital](#). Add these two anchor institutions to our network of over 50 health clinics, along with the [New Orleans East Hospital](#).

Further, enrollment under our state's newly expanded [Medicaid program](#) has begun. In Orleans Parish alone, more than 35,000 people have already enrolled just a few weeks in.

They will have access to necessary preventative care like never before. Plus, Medicaid expansion will help our economy. After all, we need healthy workers to fill the 15,000 new jobs created since 2010.

And there are many more new jobs soon to come.





The first place to look is at the airport.

Already, 10 million people are coming through [Louis Armstrong](#) every year. That is a new record. But I think we can do more.

So after decades of starts and stops, talking and doing nothing, in January we broke ground on a [new airport](#). This will mean more jobs, more flights and more business... more good things for New Orleans.



The second major jobs project I want to highlight is the World Trade Center redevelopment.

**Many have tried and failed to redevelop this piece of prime real estate and many have tried to stop it, but with our partners at the Four Seasons we are going to get this done.**

**That means a \$364 million investment, 1,600 construction jobs, 450 permanent jobs with aggressive DBE goals. It is time to break ground on the Four Seasons.**



**And now you can add the jobs at the airport and the World Trade Center to more jobs at another major asset – the [Port of New Orleans](#).**

**As the crown jewel in one of the world's largest port systems, what happens on the river is vital to not only to our local economy, but the nation's economy as well. And it is even more important now that the Panama Canal is widening and we're exploring our relationship with Cuba.**

**Since 2012, another \$100 million has been invested in the port. We just opened a massive new terminal with space for 2000 more huge shipping containers. That means new jobs and faster movement of goods, which means even more business and more jobs.**

**And beyond these major projects, we are also diversifying our economy with digital media, biosciences and water management. This is what a strong, diverse, 21<sup>st</sup> century economy looks like.**

**And getting people to and from these jobs is also really important.**





That's why we've also announced a [major expansion of public transit](#), with more overnight RTA service, more buses on the busiest routes, and a new airport line. Plus, this fall a new streetcar along Rampart Street and St Claude Avenue will be done.

And we already have the new Loyola Avenue streetcar line.

We've gone from 5 miles of bike lanes to more than 100.

And finally two new ferries are on the way, along with a brand new ferry terminal on what will be a redesigned riverfront.

So we're rocking it in the air, water, and on the ground.



Now let's talk about streets.

It is a painful but good sign that nowadays I get more complaints about construction delays than potholes. Although, to be sure, I get plenty of both.

Here are the facts.



We've done [more street work](#) in the last six years than has ever been done in that time frame - 267 street projects completed, 122 miles of streets have been paved, and over 270,000 potholes have been filled.

And because of our hard work with FEMA, there is more to come, so brace yourselves.

After literally hundreds of meetings and conference calls, we have negotiated a historic, \$2 billion lump sum settlement with FEMA for interior streets. For years to come, this funding will pay for continuous and robust work on water and sewer lines and street repairs.

So that means more construction. And I am sorry for the inconvenience, but it is the price we have to pay for the progress we demand.

Yet, no one should be fooled; to fix all the streets would require billions more on top of this \$2 billion from FEMA. We will eventually need more money – pretty simple.

So I've asked the [Fix My Streets working group](#) to develop a master plan. They will continue to meet this summer looking at innovative ideas for funding local infrastructure.

But any long term streets solution starts with our own budget reforms.





Due to a \$6 billion building boom, we've seen major growth in local sales tax revenues. We also fixed the [firefighters pension fund](#) and made the hard decisions to close a \$100 million budget gap from the previous administration.

Now, our S&P credit rating has been upgraded three times since 2010. It is now an A+.

That means lower interest rates, which means millions less of your money going to big banks and more money going to things like streets.

This is all really good news. But we need to do even more to reform and realign our city's finances in the long term.

Now, I want to discuss two of our top priorities that are more difficult – affordable housing and public safety.





In recent years, we have spent more than \$1 billion on affordable public housing.

Projects big and small – from the 78 unit [Bastion development](#) for injured veterans we're breaking ground on today in Gentilly, to the complete reinvention of what we used to call the Big Four housing projects.

The point was to rebuild NOT as it was, but how it always should have been.

Because even before Katrina, public housing was in disrepair. It wasn't what the people of New Orleans needed or deserved.

Now, not only are there beautiful new affordable apartments in much safer neighborhoods, but there is so much more. Look at Faubourg Lafitte where there is also a community center, a pool and nearby, schools, parks, playgrounds and businesses.

So when [President Obama came to New Orleans](#) and visited Faubourg Lafitte, he saw a holistically redeveloped, vibrant, affordable community right in the heart of a red hot housing market.

And that is another unmistakable sign of our progress and how far we've come – the private housing market is off the charts.

We should remember that in 2010, New Orleans' neighborhoods were struggling.

We were wondering if anyone was coming back. Now, we don't have to wonder. We know the answer.

**New Orleans is one of the fastest growing major American cities and we have one of the highest metro area economic growth rates in the country.**

**We were the most blighted city in America.**



**Now we're reducing blight faster than anywhere else – 15,000 blighted units gone. The private housing market has set a record for properties being bought and sold.**

**Citywide property values are up 54% and the value of some homes has doubled, even tripled. That means more money for homeowners and more generational wealth for New Orleans' families. But with this positive development also comes a new set of very serious challenges.**

**People are flocking here, but rising demand and job growth means that since 1999 rent has increased by 50 percent.**

**And here's the problem - wages are essentially flat.**

**Now, low wages and high housing costs means that many New Orleanians pay more than 50 percent of their income just on housing costs.**

**That is unsustainable and has to be fixed.**





**So in close collaboration with our partners, we have developed, and today, we are announcing our [new five year housing plan](#).**

**In the first 2 years we will create or preserve another 4000 affordable housing units for the working people of New Orleans.**

**We will work with the City Council and City Planning Commission to put into place new inclusionary zoning policies that will require more affordable units at major new private multi-family developments.**

**And we will develop and completely redesign city economic incentives so we can further increase affordable housing production.**

**Through these efforts, we will incentivize a more innovative, equitable, and strong private housing market.**

**But here is the big catch – you can't have opportunity, you can't have healthy families, you can't have thriving neighborhoods, without public safety.**



**Since taking office in 2010, we moved quickly to develop and implement broad solutions. To this end, we're making dramatic changes at the police department.**

**To prevent another Danziger tragedy and to improve community/police relations, we have and are implementing the [NOPD consent decree](#). It is the most comprehensive police reform in American history.**

**Now we insist on transparency with body cameras.**

**We are re-training for community policing, holding everyone accountable.**

**And we are growing the department so there are more high performing police officers on the streets and in our neighborhoods.**

**We have two recruit classes in session right now, one will graduate in July and another recruit class will immediately follow.**

**We're making progress and the independent consent decree monitor says that they have, quote "witnessed a transformation in the attitude and commitment of NOPD management toward change... marked by commitment and cooperation throughout the Department."**

**Our goal is for the police and the community to be one.**

**No-one better exemplifies this idea than Officer Natasha Hunter. She comes from a family of police officers and tirelessly served the people of**

New Orleans until she was tragically killed in the line of duty earlier this month. Please join me in a moment of silence in her memory.



Making our city safe goes beyond drastically improving the NOPD. That is why we've introduced [NOLA FOR LIFE](#), our aggressive and comprehensive murder reduction strategy.

Through NOLA FOR LIFE, we've combined the entire criminal justice system into one Multi Agency Gang Unit.

Led by NOPD, this special unit also includes State Troopers, the Sheriff's Office, the State Department of Corrections, Probation and Parole, the US Attorney, US Marshalls, DEA, ATF, FBI, and our District Attorney.

This is our new way to fight organized violent criminals – as one big team in one big fight against criminals like Telly Hankton, the 3NG gang, the 110ers, the Young Melph Mafia, and many others, and we're going to win this fight.

Moving forward, in partnership with Councilmember Williams and Councilmember Gray, we have proposed a package of gun safety and responsibility ordinances meant to protect kids and keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

But really, NOLA FOR LIFE is about prevention because we need to tackle the root causes of crime.



To really make progress, we have to expand the circle of opportunity and we have to bring people hope. That means connecting the 52% of African American men in our city who are not working-- to jobs.



To that end, we have invested in a first rate jobs training program called [STRIVE](#).

STRIVE creates pathways to prosperity through a crash course on everything professional. And it can be intense, but gets you ready to go to work. Earlier this month we celebrated the 8<sup>th</sup> graduating class of STRIVE.

Through STRIVE, and with our partners like the Urban League and JOB1, we've connected 241 mostly African American men to jobs.

80% are still working after 6 months. That's how we know it works.

One young man named Ishmel came to STRIVE because he was sick of being 'in the game'. Now we've hired him. He's been working at the Sewerage and Water Board for more than 6 months and he is doing great.

Another example is Margaret - a single mother of five. Before STRIVE, she and her kids stayed at a homeless shelter. Now, she has a job and a safe place to live.

In a similar vein, another key aspect of our Economic Opportunity strategy is our reentry program. We want to help people exiting prison. So these returning citizens never go back.

A great example is our outstanding STRIVE staffer Patrick, who is with us here today.

He served 13 years in prison. But somewhere along the way he decided to change and to lead. While in prison, he not only got an associate's degree, but also a culinary certification and welding diploma.

And now he is helping to pick people up, just like he was picked up. He's helping hundreds of people change. And he is living proof of what is possible.

Because of all these public safety initiatives - we are now seeing progress.

Today we will release a [four year progress report on NOLA FOR LIFE.](#)

The work speaks for itself and is supported by reams of data.

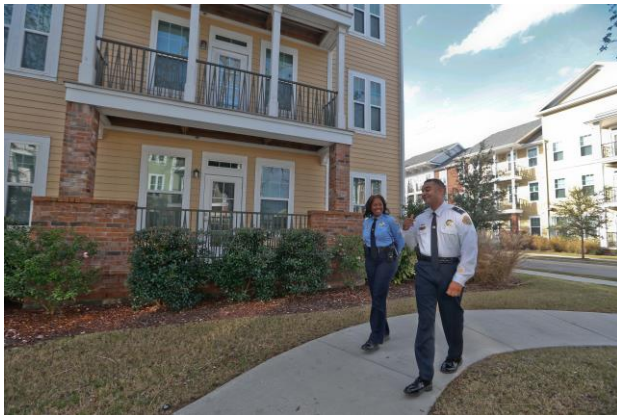
The Multi Agency Gang Unit has indicted 118 gang or group members and the word is out.

In 2011, 55% of New Orleans murders were gang or group related. Now, we've cut that in half. Violent gangs are getting the message - stop shooting... or we are coming for you and we're going to get you.

Last year, crime was down.

And half way through 2016 we are again on track to have the lowest number of murders since 1971.

In fact, since we launched NOLA FOR LIFE in 2012, we've reduced murder more than any other similar peer city. That is good news.



**That said, for the first quarter of 2016 some other crime has ticked back up – especially for armed robbery and carjacking. And response times have been too slow. This is not acceptable. By moving dozens of officers from behind desks to the street and funding more overtime, together we've launched a nearly 100 officer surge on the street.**

**We're also working to ensure police officers are focused like a laser on violent crime and not on low level property crime, fender benders or false alarms.**

**Above all else, public safety is our top priority.**

**And while it is hard to do, we have proven that we can make a difference.**

**We know how to get better fast and to win//but we still have a long way to go.**

**There is still too much poverty, too much crime, too many shootings, too many deaths, not enough jobs, too much distrust, alienation and fear, too many broken families, broken streets.**

**So many of us live a block away from each other, but often live a world apart.**

**Here's the thing: When we are together, we have shown there is nothing we cannot do. But too often we hear - 'not my neighborhood', 'not my kids', 'not my problem'.**

**We have to break down the barriers that divide us and make sure no one is being left behind.**

**Just last week, we announced another initiative called [Equity New Orleans](#) which will seek to do just that.**

**So let's reject the lie that any of us can prosper without the support of others.**

**Let's reject the lie that things have always been this way and will always be this way. We've proven this to be not true.**





**Over many years, we created these problems, so we can fix them.**

**That means doubling down on NOLA FOR LIFE, NOPD reform, and crime prevention.**

**That means right sizing the jail and running it correctly.**

**That means investing more in recreation.**

**It means creating more jobs.**

**It means reducing the number of homeless on our streets.**

**It means engaging the private sector to devote more time and energy to our economic opportunity strategy.**

**It means encouraging our businesses to pay higher wages.**

**And it means implementing our new housing strategy.**

**Because here is the truth, the state of our city is strong and getting stronger every day. And while we have a long way to go, I am confident because the wind is at our back.**

**You see, demographics are destiny and the data shows that in 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in cities like New Orleans.**

**Cities that will attract people, create jobs and grow wealth will be cities that are open and inviting, tolerant, entrepreneurial, creative, healthy and smart. And most importantly culturally rich and authentic.**

**There is no city better poised than New Orleans to benefit from this seismic demographic tsunami.**

**But the future does not belong to any city that closes its doors to those seeking refuge.**

**The future does not belong to any city that closes its heart to our Hispanic brothers and sisters who helped us rebuild our homes after Katrina and are still doing so to this very day. Or to our Muslim neighbors who assert their religious liberty to choose his or her faith, or to the LGBTQ community, who to this day, remains under assault.**



**The future does not belong to a city who closes itself off to young African American boys and girls who still feel left out of the mainstream.**

**Or to working class New Orleanians left behind by an economy that feels rigged and rewards only a few.**

**And finally, the future can never belong to sleepy southern towns that just kick back and spend any time revering the Confederacy.**

**Diversity is New Orleans' greatest strength, not a weakness.**

**We have a wonderful future together, but not much of one on our own.**

**This is a time for choosing.**

**We must move boldly and courageously into the next New Orleans century.**

**We must take care of our own business and work to break down the barriers that have kept us apart for so long.**

**We have already come so far.**

**Remember what it must have looked like from this rooftop 11 years ago following Katrina – it was death and desperation.**

**I've told this story before. About a woman I met on a boat in the lower 9<sup>th</sup> ward. Wet and covered by nothing but a tattered dress; clutching only a clock.**

**I asked her why she held onto the clock so tightly. She said she didn't know anything, she didn't have anything, but at least she knew what time it was. She'd lost everything and was holding onto the only thing she had left.**



**Flash forward nearly 11 years to this spring as we opened up a new CVS. It is the first major national retailer in Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward history.**

**And as we were about to cut the ribbon a woman came out of the crowd and told everyone that she had something to say.**

**She said her name was Margie and that she was the lady with the clock - and it was then that I learned the rest of the story...**

**After we pulled her out of the water and sent her along on the St. Claude Bridge, she was evacuated to Houston and then somehow made it all the**

way to Philadelphia. She had surgery and before she made it back her husband passed away.

It was a long, winding road, but she found her way back. Now she is home in the same house in Lower Nine where we first met 11 years ago.

And as we talked, and I listened to her story, I realized just how far we have come.

In Margie's face, I see New Orleans.

I see the determination of a people who would never let go of this precious place we all call home.

Together, we will create a city of our dreams, but it will take everything that we've got.

We have many challenges ahead. But we have reason to be hopeful because we know joy cometh in the morning.

In closing, let me say that in six years, we have balanced budgets and reduced spending, streamlined government and consolidated board and commissions.

We reformed pensions, transformed procurement practices to eliminate corruption, redesigned and reformed the Aviation Board, Public Belt Railroad, NORDC, the NOLA Business Alliance, the NOPD and the Sewerage and Water Board. And today the jail.

On a more macro level, we as a city have completely overhauled our education and our healthcare systems-- all of which have and will continue to strengthen our economy.

So yes, the state of New Orleans is stronger than it has been in modern history and getting stronger every day.

We have changed from a way that did not work to a new way that does, turned the city around and have successfully laid a very strong foundation for future growth.

Now we just have to keep going.



**We only get there by moving forward together.**

**We cannot leave anyone behind.**

**So let's get back to work.**

**Thank you and God bless the people of New Orleans.**